



4905 Ruf Ave. Fort Rucker, AL 36362-5363
Comm. (334) 255-3770 Fax (334) 255-2609
<https://safety.army.mil>

READY ...OR NOT?

Accident reporting results in safer force

David San Miguel
Directorate of Communication and Public Affairs
U.S. Army Combat Readiness Center

On guard mount, readying to begin his squad's shift, the driver turns the ignition on his HMMWV. It immediately cranks, then begins to smoke. Fire soon engulfs the vehicle, but fortunately the crew is able to egress without injury.

Once the smoke dissipates, the motor sergeant investigates to determine the exact cause of the fire. He determines the likely source was faulty electrical wiring in the battery compartment beneath the vehicle commander's seat. He estimates the damage at about \$269,000 — a total loss. The sergeant dutifully reports the incident up the chain, but little does he realize that particular issue is causing concern in motor pools across the Army.

Though this particular unit did the right thing by reporting the incident immediately, others resist or hesitate to report accidents promptly.

"Often units downplay the significance of an incident and don't bother reporting it," said Peggy Adams, Ground Directorate, U.S. Army Combat Readiness Center.

"Accident reports help us better understand what's going on out there so we can intervene and possibly mitigate accidents and injuries," she explained. "More importantly, they help us better understand where problems are trending. If the Army doesn't have insight into these issues, it can't fix the problem."

Battery fires like the incident described above were part of a larger issue that affected units Armywide. Subsequent investigations determined the fires were a result of the battery location within the engine compartment.

"Had more units reported the issue sooner, we could have preempted and resolved it before more damage was sustained," Adams said. "So, it's very critical that units not think it's an isolated event or not report something because they felt they did something wrong. It could be a bigger issue."

Larry Kulsrud, Accident Investigations Division, USACRC, said there are many reasons to report accidents in a timely manner.

"One reason is that it's required by federal law and Army regulation," he said, listing AR 385-10 and DODI 6055.01 as guiding documents.

“Most individuals see it as an inconvenience. It’s just another form, something else they have to do that they don’t have enough time to do,” he said. “You have to look beyond the time it’s going to take to complete the form.

“That information goes into a database where it can be researched and analyzed. It helps us identify trends and equipment deficiencies that routinely go unnoticed were it not for the accident report.”

Kulsrud illustrated this point.

“If you have a component that routinely breaks down, it costs the Army in downtime and replacement costs,” he said. “Whereas, if we can identify problems through the accident reporting process, they can be addressed and either redesigned or replaced by newer components.”

One such improvement resulted after several military vehicle rollover accidents were reported. The end result was development of a restraint system designed to keep gunners inside their vehicles during rollovers.

Such developments only serve to better protect our nation’s most precious resource, Kulsrud said.

“When the USACRC was founded, it was focused on aviation,” he said. “When you look at what was killing aviators in the 1960s and 1970s, it was impact forces and fire. So we developed report forms, established data points, trained safety officers and went out to the field to collect and investigate accidents.”

Kulsrud explained those initial reports led to important developments in safety.

“Using that information, the materiel developers designed breakaway fuel valves, self-sealing fuel tanks and nitrogen inerting units,” he said. “Data collected on impact forces resulted in the five-point restraint harness, stroking landing gear, stroking seats and cockpit airbags. Aircraft systems that would have killed the crew a generation ago, literally allow the crew to walk away from a crash today. All that as a result of information generated from accident reports.”

Accurate accident reporting continues to be vital to improving Soldier safety.

“Unit leaders should encourage feedback from their Soldiers,” Kulsrud said. “This feedback is critical to correcting deficiencies in equipment safety, and that’s what this program is all about. We need that Soldier! He or she is too valuable to lose just because someone failed to recognize or report a safety issue.”

For more information on accident reporting, visit <https://safety.army.mil>.